

# TOOLBOX TALKS

## Verifying Utilities-Potholing Best Practices

Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter Name \_\_\_\_\_

Job Site/Project \_\_\_\_\_

Physical verification by exposing underground utilities is required when: your excavation crosses marked utilities; your excavation parallels marked utilities; and anytime you need to use mechanized equipment within the tolerance zone.

- The tolerance zone is defined as the width of the utility plus 18 inches on either side.
- Test holes should be dug at points where your excavation crosses marked utilities, or at reasonable intervals when paralleling marked utilities.
- Test holes should be dug using soft excavation such as: hand digging, soft digging, pneumatic tools, hydro and vacuum excavation.
- If hand dug test holes are required always use blunt ended tools. Picks, axes, posthole diggers, spades, and pry/probing bars can damage utilities.
- Never jump on or use excessive force with hand tools. Aggressive use of hand tools can cause as much or more damage as mechanized equipment.
- Remember, underground utility location is depth blind. Utilities are installed at a prescribed depth, but erosion and changes in grade can alter this depth over time.
- Begin potholing in an area to the side of a marked utility line. Keep the face of the shovel parallel with the utility markings. Use a prying action to loosen the dirt with a blunt shovel; a regular spade can be used to remove the loosened soil from the hole. Never stab at the soil.
- Slowly and carefully begin extending the pothole walls toward the marked utility. Dig at an angle, continuing to keep the shovel face parallel to the utility line marks. This will allow the shovel to slide off the surface of a utility should you hit one.
- Look for signs you are nearing the buried utility such as changes in soil types, softening of the soil, or warning tapes.
- Once the utility line is visible, use extra caution removing the remaining soil. Fully expose the extremities of the utility line. If you can't find the facility after digging to a reasonable depth notify the utility operator immediately.
- Once the utility is exposed, take precautions to protect the facility from damage that can result from falling debris, shifting soil, or equipment and persons working in the area.

Attendees

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